

OUTLINE FOR NEW POLICIES IN VIETNAM

Introduction - We must design a new policy and execute it boldly and imaginatively if we are to meet successfully the challenge of communist revolutionary warfare in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Unless we refine our objectives and realign our programs and organization in a broad political and regional framework, we will face defeat inevitably.

Therefore this paper proposes a new and unorthodox approach in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. President Johnson has made it clear that we are determined to preserve freedom and security in Southeast Asia. As Americans, we are already devoting our time, our money, and our lives to achieve this objective, especially in South Vietnam. But something vital has obviously been lacking. Specifically, we propose the following Six-Point Program to help the Vietnamese win their war and to stabilize Southeast Asia:

1. Statement of Objectives on national resurgence for Vietnam, and regional development for Southeast Asia
2. Organization of a Political Action Campaign to mobilize leaders and arouse the Vietnamese people in the villages to active participation
3. Promotion of Social and Economic Reforms to serve both the short and long-term objectives of the dynamic fight for freedom
4. Initiation of Instant Defense measures to protect villages and individuals around the clock
5. Interposition of SEATO Forces to insulate Vietnam and the Mekong Valley from communist aggression by seepage
6. Declaration of a Johnson Plan for a Mekong Strategy of Development.

Statement of Objectives

The Vietnamese must have a purpose worth fighting for - a purpose which will generate popular allegiance, enthusiasm and sacrifice. It is for them to develop their own goals and methods, but we can encourage and help them. Peace, unity, independence and prosperity in Vietnam are our mutual aims.

The United States too, must reframe and clarify its political thinking in Southeast Asia. It must be ready to increase its efforts and to make more sacrifices, if necessary. To achieve peaceful stabilization for Southeast Asia and freedom for Vietnam, this paper suggests a new strategy for the socio-economic development and military guarantee of the Mekong River Basin covering Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia. With suitable safeguards, the benefits could extend to North Vietnam once the war is ended.

Organization of a Political Action Campaign

The political requirements in Vietnam are: national civilian leadership, a national revolutionary corps, a new psychological approach for rural resurgence, and new political agencies and movements to mobilize country-wide resurgence. We stress

herein the positive and dynamic goals of resurgency, rather than counter-insurgency and civic action which are important, but subordinate, techniques for achieving resurgency.

a. Political Leadership and Structure at the National Level: A shift from military to civilian personalities at the top is necessary in Saigon. The Vietnamese, with our backing, must choose leaders around whom others can rally and get the resurgence program started. Successful resurgence in the urban and rural areas must be geared to dynamic political leadership in Saigon. Such leadership should be primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, civilian. It must, above all, be imaginative and daring, patriotic and selfless. The personalities are there to be mobilized. There are groups and individuals in Vietnam to support, encourage, and protect, if need be, by the force of American diplomacy and political intervention. In military as well as in political affairs, provincial officials, especially province chiefs, must have clear and decisive roles, and the task of implementing a resurgence plan must be chiefly theirs. There are Vietnamese with administrative experience whom we can support for this task. They need our consistent backing as thoroughly as do leaders at the top. Potential provincial leaders can and should be trained under a joint Vietnamese-American program.

b. National Revolutionary Core: To carry out reforms for freedom, prosperity and social welfare, the students, intellectuals, professionals, genuine local leaders and innovators in the villages should be organized and trained to mount this rural resurgence through village action programs based on the nucleus of "revolutionary circles" and rural strong points. Thousands of Vietnamese students could be mobilized for village work like the Rural Reconstruction Movement in the Philippines or the Education Corps in Iran.

c. Program of Rural Resurgence: A movement of rural resurgence in the countryside can only succeed on a four-fold basis:

1. There must be new regional and local leadership reflecting national purposes while representing village people fearlessly, independently, and authentically;
2. There must be social and economic reforms planned both on a long-term and a "crash" basis and implemented as rapidly and vigorously as possible.
3. There must be security in villages and across the countryside. Progress and protection go hand in hand. Good politics needs good police and vice versa.
4. Political action, reforms, and security must be organized and programmed systematically, area by area, village by village. Only by tackling as an entity the problems of the countryside, the village and the farmer can win in Vietnam.

A program of rural resurgence would aim first at new civilian political action to mobilize leaders and to obtain popular response. It would stress authentic indigenous consent, election and initiative, genuine village determination or real individual and group "self" needs, and lateral aid between community representatives who are the villagers' real choice and government officials who

win the villagers' instinctive trust. The emphasis here is on civilian political action because the police and military are disliked in Vietnam and rural Asia. That is one reason we are not making headway. We need a "revolutionary program" of freedom.

The Vietnamese must come to believe in themselves and in their cause if they are to defeat the Vietcong. Village reform must be comprehended and implemented by a nucleus of local leaders who understand local problems. Specialists from the cities, such as trained labor leaders, and non-specialist, such as students willing to work in something akin to a Peace Corps, can be of tremendous help, but the dynamic impetus for political and social-economic progress must be furnished primarily by local people. Such people can be trained to acquire techniques, but their consciousness and awareness of what self-help means, while these qualities can be partially inculcated, cannot be totally taught and must be natural characteristics. There are Vietnamese who have these capacities, but such men and women need guidance and direction at the outset, and careful follow-up supervision afterward. It is as important to weed out people who lack drive, who are lazy or are poor workers, as it is to build up a hard core of able reformers and administrators.

A program of rural resurgence would organize a "honeycomb" of resurgent villages in a rural cluster, or "revolutionary circle", around a rural center providing a multitude of services. With our revolution of abundance in contrast to Communist scarcity, we in the West can provide local leaders with all the necessary material if a political approach first wins the allegiance and inspiration of the rural people on their terms. Obviously, a political and material program of resurgence will require a good cause and a substantial civilian organization, as well as time and top leadership.

Rural resurgence must be programmed systematically like any political campaign, let us say on a ten-year Plan. With this Plan, "resurgence corps" of some 10,000 Vietnamese and 10,000 Asians and Americans with technical abilities should be recruited and trained for assignment to each rural center. At the same time, farmers and village leaders - including women - must be systematically drawn into the selection, formulation, and execution of rural reforms.

The important tool in resurgence is the rural center and stronghold - the rural town. It would service a network of a dozen or so villages for supplies, trained helpers, market places, maintenance, communications, an airstrip, vocational training, a small hospital and local militia and arms. Together they would form a "revolutionary circle". For Vietnam in particular, and the Mekong Basin as a whole, a program of resurgence can be calculated in multiples of villages and circles by priority categories for target areas to determine how many organizers, advisors, and village workers are necessary; when, where, and how much equipment and supplies to put in the pipe line; and what results to complete on target dates.

d. Political Movements: Because genuine mass organizations have been missing in Vietnam since 1955, resurgence needs the Buddhist movement purged of communist infiltration, the Catholics, the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects, the Confederation of Workers, the Farmers Associations, area groupings around Saigon on Hue, and other popular groups. But they must be authentically representative at the bottom. Ultimately, some sort of over-all national movement of resurgence is also needed to coordinate the activities of these various organizations. Much of the

"aid and reform" could be channelled through these organizations directly to village people. This would be lateral or horizontal assistance, which is generally preferable to vertical paternalism from on top.

e. Armed Services Civic Action: These programs have relied too much on technique and too little on attitudes. They should be dovetailed in with political action for resurgence. Civic action of the military can reinforce reforms but should aim first at befriending the rural people. The Vietnamese Army does not sufficiently understand or practice this. The Vietcong does. Civic action, to be successful, demands above all courtesy and tact. Complete soldier-civilian cooperation and understanding in Vietnam are vital. Without them all our efforts will be futile. Such broad terms as "pacification" and "psychological warfare" mean little or nothing if the human attributes are lacking. In the past these qualities have indeed been missing.

f. Elections: Since the introduction of democracy and democratic forms is important but tricky, it is necessary to proceed from the ground upwards. It is unwise to move too rapidly toward national elections. Promises that cannot be kept should not be made. The choice of local leaders by villagers should be the first step. This should be programmed and accomplished wherever security permits, and even where it does not. Local elections, whether conducted formally or informally, should be extended to district levels, and then to the provincial level.

g. Economic and Social Reforms: The whole problem of Vietnam, including American aid in Vietnam, has not been geared to meeting the political and social demands of revolutionary change. Cement for roads is helpful, but farm security, pig-raising projects and bona fide farmers' associations are what Vietnamese farmers want. A truly dynamic land reform program based on honest distribution of land to the peasants, with a moratorium on all land and taxes payments to landlords, is imperative if the attraction of the Vietcong "free land" policy is to be challenged. Additional schemes, such as increase of credit funds and cheap fertilizer distribution, should supplement the basic land reform plan, and further agricultural aid of various sorts, including assistance in the planning and planting of basic and rotation crops, is necessary. The fundamental objectives of USOM are commendable. Most of its current programs can be usefully applied, but they should all be subject to constant re-appraisal and revision as circumstances change. Most important, the capacity and need to introduce "crash aid" must be recognized.

Initiation of Instant Defense for Village Security

Without constant and instant protection for each village, no progress of political and social reform can be sustained. We need to discard military orthodoxy altogether and to create a new system of instant defense.

This should be based on small, fast, lightly-equipped mobile combat groups selected from the Popular Force (formerly the Self Defense Corps and the Hamlet Militia). They should consist of local citizens from each "revolutionary circle" - a term designating a group of hamlets or villages which have been accorded initial security by the regular Vietnamese army (ARVN). These mobile combat groups should operate around the clock in scheduled relays. Their mission should not only afford daily and hourly protection to the villages in each "revolutionary group", but should also track down and flush out suspected Vietcong agents and units.

These popular village commando forces should be equipped differently from the regular Vietnamese Army. Their weapons should be specially tailored to meet their special objectives. Their equipment should include M-16 rifles, needle or "flechette" guns, light personal gear, food capsules and small radios. A regional organization of "air jeeps" should be provided by the United States for fast transportation and constant reconnaissance.

Interposition of SEATO Forces

a. Insulation of Vietnam: American military effort is required to bolster the defense of Vietnam and insulate it from significant infiltration. Minimally, it would seem desirable to station highly mobile American combat groups at strategic points, such as air fields and communications junctions. These points must embrace the border areas between South Vietnam and Laos and between South Vietnam and Cambodia, across which most of the infiltration from North Vietnam occurs. There are native elements, among them Khmers, montagnards, and some Lao tribal groups, that should be utilized, along with Vietnamese, to help secure these border zones. American and Vietnamese special forces contingents should be substantially increased to help achieve this broad purpose, and to firm up commando units, including the village instant defense teams in their stages of formation.

b. Southeast Asia "Hold Fast" Line: However, insulation of Vietnam alone is not enough. Regional military interposition to enforce the cease-fire in Laos and nullify the communist sanctuaries is necessary. We believe that Vietnamese and selected cooperating allied units should announce and undertake hot pursuit and reprisal attacks against military targets in Laos and North Vietnam when military circumstances demand this.

Furthermore, we believe this new Allied force should establish a line of defense running diagonally from a point below the 17th parallel on the South Vietnamese coast to Tchepone, in Laos near the Vietnamese border, and then diagonally northwest up across Laos to the 110th longitude and 23rd parallel, just northwest of Nam Tha. This would bisect the Plain de Jarres, go around Luang Prabang and thus keep the Mekong Valley below the line. In effect such a line would partition Laos and simply define, formally, a political and military situation that already exists, except for Pong Saly Province.

The above measures would not, in all likelihood, "escalate" the war to a point that would provoke involvement of North Vietnamese or Chinese troops and thus threaten to create a larger conflict.

Johnson Plan for a Mekong Strategy of Development

We should stop "compartmentalizing" Vietnam and instead adopt a regional political strategy to tie together all these separate political and military moves. The United States should propose to the United Nations a large-scale, 30-year plan for the development of the water and power resources of the Mekong River Basin. This would center on the four riparian, predominately Buddhist nations of Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia now cooperating so extraordinarily for the preparation of such development. Already started is a nucleus on which a Johnson Plan can expand. The pre-investment work is almost completed and construction can begin if there is security and peace.

A Johnson Plan for the Mekong Basin would seek to pacify tensions and remove the seeds of war in Southeast Asia. It would strengthen the self-determination of the four riparian nations, utilize the immunity of the UN for non-partisan development, improve the living standards of the rural masses, attract universal endorsement, and neutralize communist aggression or opposition. Such a structure of regional development could bring a new kind of moral, political, and territorial integrity to this tormented region, and offer a tolerable and practical way out to all concerned.

This Mekong strategy would offer a much better alternative to the dilemmas of Southeast Asia than either France's proposal of diplomatic neutralization or the communists' insistence on reconvening the old Geneva Conference of fourteen members. Instead, we could propose a new and different conference to include those fourteen countries plus seven additional ones having a special interest in or contribution to make to the Mekong region: Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand and the Federal Republic of Germany. This Twenty-One Power Conference could work out the terms for a new cease-fire line and a demilitarized zone, reciprocal guarantees and observance of non-intervention, and arrangements for establishing the Mekong Project. Then, the United Nations General Assembly could cap it all with a resolution of enablement and the establishment of a Mekong Valley Authority. Ultimately, this could provide the Vietcong with the inducement to choose economic cooperation in preference to unending and costly military aggression.

Military interposition would thus be geared to broad political objectives: to preserve the integrity of these four nations in a riparian "condominium", to promote enactment of and insure immunity for a UN Project, to help the people in the Mekong Basin, and to remove it from military confrontation and communist subversion. Such political and military intervention on mainland Southeast Asia would take years but it would make the Laos cease-fire stick, nullify the communist sanctuary, and give birth to a new UN cause. Our great military power aligned with this cause would probably induce the communists to acquiesce in the Mekong Project rather than suffer the alternative. All told this would bring peace and stability to Southeast Asia. The people of the Mekong Valley could prosper in hope. The forces of freedom would be builders, not just bombers.

Conclusion

To obtain meaningful results, this Six-Point Program will require vigorous leadership now and for at least a decade. Yet we are confident that Americans will understand and respond affirmatively at this critical hour. Winston Churchill once wrote of us Americans: "Their national psychology is such that the bigger the Idea the more wholeheartedly and obstinately do they throw themselves into making it a success. It is an admirable characteristic provided the Idea is good".

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